

Message Text

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SUBJ: QUEBEC LIBERAL PARTY ELECTORAL PROGRAM

SPECIFIES CONDITIONS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL
PATRIATION AND BRANDISHES BIG STICK
AGAINST LABOR UNION

1. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE BOURASSA CAME TO POWER IN 1970, QUEBEC'S LIBERALS HAVE DEFINED RATHER CLEARLY THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH QUEBEC WOULD AGREE TO REPATRIATING CANADIAN CONSTITUTION. THEIR VIEWS ARE SPELLED OUT IN QUEBEC LIBERAL PARTY ELECTION PLATFORM WHICH ALSO DEFINES CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY, DISCUSSES DIVISION OF LEGISLATIVE POWER BETWEEN FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL LEVELS, PROPOSES TO LEGITIMIZE SUPREME COURT'S FUNCTION AS CONSTITUTIONAL ARBITRATOR, SUPPORTS BILINGUAL POLICY IN FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS, AND PROPOSES CHANGES IN RULES GOVERNING LABOR RELATIONS.

2. LIBERAL PLATFORM CALLS FOR GREATER LEGISLATIVE AUTONOMY FOR QUEBEC IN MATTERS AFFECTING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE (I.E. ARTS, LETTERS, CULTURAL HERITAGE, COMMUNICATION, AND IMMIGRATION) AND FOR INCORPORATION INTO CANADA'S NEW CONSTITUTION OF THE
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CULTURAL GUARANTEES NECESSARY TO PROTECT THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

AND CULTURE. IF THEY FORM NEXT GOVERNMENT, LIBERALS WILL DEMAND "THAT QUEBEC'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SAFEGUARDING AND PROMOTION OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE WITHIN TERRITORY OF QUEBEC" BE NOTED IN NEW CONSTITUTION. THERE IS NOT HOWEVER, ANY SUGGESTION OF A SPECIAL STATUS FOR QUEBEC IN OTHER AREAS WHICH THE LIBERAL PLATFORM SAYS SHOULD BE BROUGHT UNDER SOME PROVINCIAL AUTHORITY. ALL PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS, NOT JUST QUEBEC, SHOULD HAVE "LEGISLATIVE PRIMACY" IN COMMUNICATIONS WITHIN THEIR PROVINCE AND IN "INTEGRATION" OF IMMIGRANTS. THESE DEMANDS WILL BE BARGAINING CONDITIONS IN QUEBEC'S CONSTITUTIONAL NEGOTIATIONS WITH OTTAWA AND OTHER PROVINCES. IN EFFECT, CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY HAS BEEN DEFINED AS LEGISLATIVE PRIMACY IN CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC, COMMUNICATIONS, AND IMMIGRATION MATTERS; THAT IS, A LAW ADOPTED BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN THESE AREAS WOULD TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER A SIMILAR OR CONTRADICTORY LAW PASSED BY CANADIAN PARLIAMENT.

3. PLATFORM ALSO STATES THAT CLEANING UP QUEBEC'S LABOR RELATIONS IS "ABSOLUTE PRIORITY" OF LIBERAL PARTY. IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR, STRIKES ARE TO BE "AVOIDED" BY CHANGING THE BARGAINING RULES. CHANGES COULD INCLUDE COMPULSORY SECRET STRIKE VOTE. IT COULD ALSO INVOLVE REMOVAL OF RIGHT TO STRIKE IN SOME SECTORS SUCH AS MEDICAL CARE. IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, WALKOUTS ARE TO BE DISCOURAGED BY CREATION OF A PREVENTIVE MEDIATION SERVICE WHICH WOULD FIND NEW METHODS OF PREVENTING LABOR CONFLICTS OR AT LEAST ATTENUATE THEM BY MEANS OF DIALOGUE DURING LIFE OF AGREEMENT SO AS TO ENABLE PARTIES TO MEET UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES OTHER THAN IN STRIKE OR COUNTER-STRIKE SITUATIONS.

4. COMMENT: DRAFTERS OF PLATFORM WERE CAREFUL TO SHOW THAT THEY WERE LOYAL TO FEDERALISM AND WILLING TO GO ALONG WITH REPATRIATION IF CONDITIONS WERE MET. IT IS THE FIRST LIBERAL TEXT IN SOME TIME TO USE PHRASES LIKE "GREAT CANADIAN EXPERIENCE", "PROUD TO BE CANADIAN", ETC., AND THE FIRST EVER TO SAY SO CLEARLY THAT FEDERAL LAW ON OFFICIAL LANGUAGES SHOULD BE SUPPORTED BY QUEBECOIS. BOURASSA HAS OPTED FOR A PACKAGE APPROACH COMBINING PATRIATION, AN AMENDING FORMULA, AND FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE. WITH PUBLICATION OF THE DOCUMENT, LIBERAL PARTY OF QUEBEC HAS CONTINUED GENERAL CONSTITUTIONAL POLICY OF ALL GOVERNMENTS OF QUEBEC IN LAST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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20 YEARS: TO CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN FEDERAL TIES EVEN WHILE SEEKING CHANGES WHICH WOULD RECOGNIZE QUEBEC REALITIES. WHILE THESE VIEWS WILL BE VERY IMPORTANT AND MUCH-DISCUSSED AT BOTH FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL LEVEL SHOULD BOURASSA BE RE-ELECTED, THEY ARE HAVING ALMOST NO EFFECT ON THE CURRENT ELECTION CAMPAIGN AS THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE HAS BEEN BYPASSED BY ISSUES WHICH INTEREST THE VOTERS MORE.

5. LABOR RELATIONS, ON THE OTHER HAND, CERTAINLY CONSTITUTE ONE OF MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES IN CAMPAIGN. HOWEVER, GIVEN BOURASSA'S WEAK RECORD IN THIS AREA, MANY OBSERVERS DOUBT THAT HIS TOUGH PROGRAM WILL YIELD MANY VOTES. IT APPEARS TO US THAT THE PROGRAM CONTAINS THE SEEDS FOR POTENTIALLY MORE SERIOUS LABOR CONFLICT SHOULD IT BE ENACTED. UNDER PLATFORM, GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE GREATLY REINFORCED POWERS END STRIKES AND WOULD BE GIVEN A QUASI-JUDICIAL FUNCTION IN ASSUMING RIGHT SEND WORKERS BACK TO WORK BEFORE INJUNCTIONS GRANTED. HOWEVER, WITH SUCH POWERS INCLUDED, PROGRAM COULD BE VERY DIFFICULT TO ADMINISTER AND WOULD DO LITTLE TO BETTER CLIMATE OF LABOR RELATIONS. IN FACT, SINCE GOQ WAS UNABLE TO GET UNIONS SUCH AS TEACHERS UNION BACK TO WORK THROUGH SPECIAL LEGISLATION, IT IS EVEN MORE DOUBTFUL THAT IT CAN SUCCEED IN IMPOSING DECISIONS RESEMBLING EXECUTIVE FIAT WHICH ARE IMPLIED IN THE PLATFORM. MCNAMARA

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